

GOSSIP episode//part 1

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# LEADER FEEDER

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Over time, **workplace gossip** can take a toll on **morale**, **cohesion**, **productivity**, and other **key workplace metrics**. If we know this, why is **gossip** still so pervasive in many organizations?

# THE Problems

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## PROBLEM #1: The definition or meaning of gossip isn't always agreed upon or shared

If you're not sure about what qualifies as **gossip** and what doesn't, use the following questions to help guide you:

- Does the talk rejoice in the misfortune of others?
- Does the talk have a negative emotional charge or seem to perpetuate conflict or negativity?
- Does the talk hurt or damage the one being spoken of?
- Will the talk be, or has the talk been said in front of the person's face?
- Is the talk unsubstantiated rumor(s) about another employee's work situation?

## PROBLEM #2: Gossip serves important purposes for employees

- **Informational purpose** - serves as a valued source of information for those who mistrust formal channels and/or when information from the top gets choked off
- **Emotional purpose** - serves as an emotional release for negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and anxiety
- **Interpersonal purpose** - serves as an indirect way of surfacing or engaging interpersonal or relationship conflict

## PROBLEM #3: Gossip gets reinforced

- **Gossip** is based on self-fulfilling prophecy as the more **gossip** is used, the more **gossip** is needed
  - **EXAMPLE:** An employee who lacks trust or efficacy in their leader, team, or organization engages in gossip – which robs them of the opportunity to test their mistrust or inefficacy

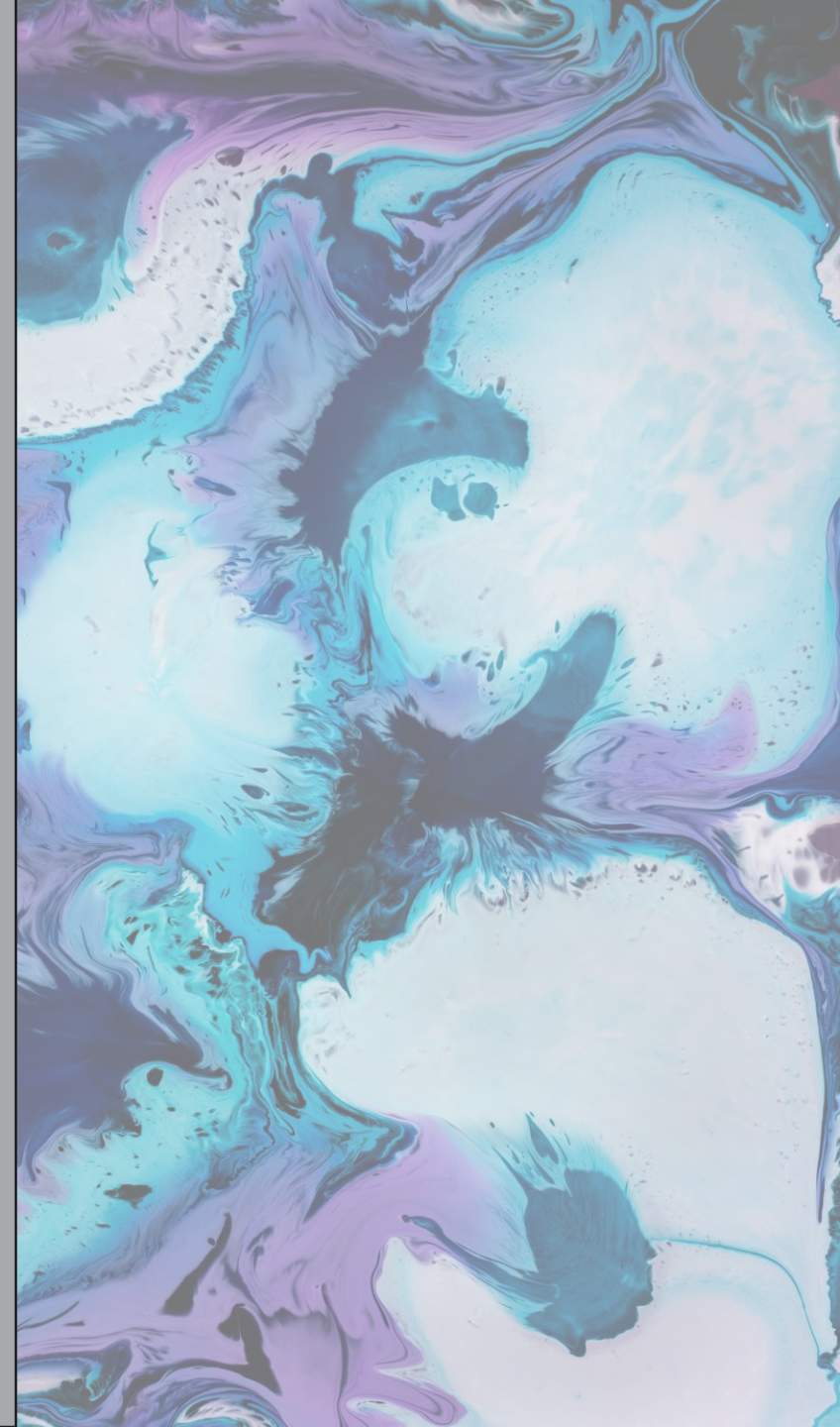
Sources: Labianca (2010); Grenny (2015); Bassuk & Lew (2016)

# Dangers of Gossip

- **Erosion of trust** and **morale**
- **Lost productivity** and **wasted time**
- **Increased anxiety** and **tension** in employees as rumors and ambiguity circulate without clear distinction between fact and fiction
- **Divisiveness** between employees as people take sides
- **Hurt feelings** and **reputations**
- **Knowledge hiding**
- **Lower creative** and **proactive, organizational citizenship behaviors** (i.e., going above and beyond what's expected, extending non-incentivized help and effort)
- **Attrition** as good employees leave because of an unhealthy, toxic work environment

# Benefits of Gossip

- Effective way of **achieving goals** in an unhealthy social system
- **Temporary relief** from problems and buffers the pain associated with conflict
- Way to **cope** with **uncertainty**
- **Attain interpersonal power** (i.e., dominance) and **reward** (i.e., self promotion)
- **Create personal bonds** that **provide social** and **emotional support**
- **Identification** of those who **don't adhere** to **group norms** and to **negotiate** what "proper" **group behavior** is and is not
- **Diagnostic tool** to keep a pulse on potential **troublesome behavior**





# Gossip happens...often

**Research cites** the following:

- **14%** of coffee-break conversations qualify as **gossip**
- Between **65-90%** of general conversations in the workplace qualify as **gossip**
- **96%** of employees admit to engaging in **gossip**

Leaders **gossip** too – Supervisors and above have (on average) **7.4** gossip partners compared to **3.9** **gossip** partners for front-line employees

**Gossip** is born out of **uncertainty**. **When uncertain**, our brains are inclined to **make assumptions** and **create narratives** that make the most sense to us or serve us well. So, what can we do about **gossip**?

GOSSIP episode//part 2  
**COMING SOON!**

**Part 2** will include **strategies and tools**  
to help you manage **GOSSIP** to ensure a **positive** and  
**thriving work environment** for all.

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GOSSIP episode//part 2

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# LEADER FEEDER

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Based on the benefits (and consequences) associated with engaging in **gossip**, it is **unlikely** to ever have it disappear completely from the workplace. But, **can we do a better job at keep harmful gossip at bay?** Read on for **tools** and **strategies** that will help you to create a **healthy functioning workplace** that breeds effective communication versus **gossip**.



THE  
**Strategies**  

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**AN OVERVIEW**

1. Don't be an Enabler
2. Encourage Direct Conversation
3. Start a Proactive Conversation
4. Be a Role Model and Promote Fellowship



## Strategy #1: **Don't be an Enabler**

**Gossipers** are often **subtly** or **overtly rewarded** when others **respond passively**, or by simply listening. Take an **active approach** and **force** the issue or situation into the open.

### To Try –

1. Reduce the supply of **gossip** by decreasing the demand. Get ahead of **gossip** before reactions and emotions metastasize into **gossip**.

**EXAMPLE:** When important decisions are made, major changes are instituted, errors happen, or uncertainty is present – gather your team and outline details around decision making, deadlines, budgets, etc. Paint the picture of what is accurate and objective, and what is not.

2. Use credible communication channels to model candor and transparency. Fill the void with facts before assumptions and suspicion become “fact.”

**EXAMPLE:** When important decisions are made, major changes are instituted, errors happen, or uncertainty is present – hold a department-wide synchronous or asynchronous meeting. Ask questions such as:

- *Informational purpose* - “Was there anything you would have liked to know about the situation before the changes were made?”
- *Emotional purpose* - “How do you feel about the decision or change?”
- *Interpersonal purpose* - “Was there anything I could have done differently to make the transition smoother or improved your experience with the change?”



## Strategy #2: Encourage Direct Conversation

If you believe there is some truth or weight to the **gossip** your team member or colleague is sharing, try to get the **concerns presented** in a **forum** where they can be addressed constructively.

### To Try –

1. Encourage your team member or colleague to raise the issue directly with the person (or people) in question.

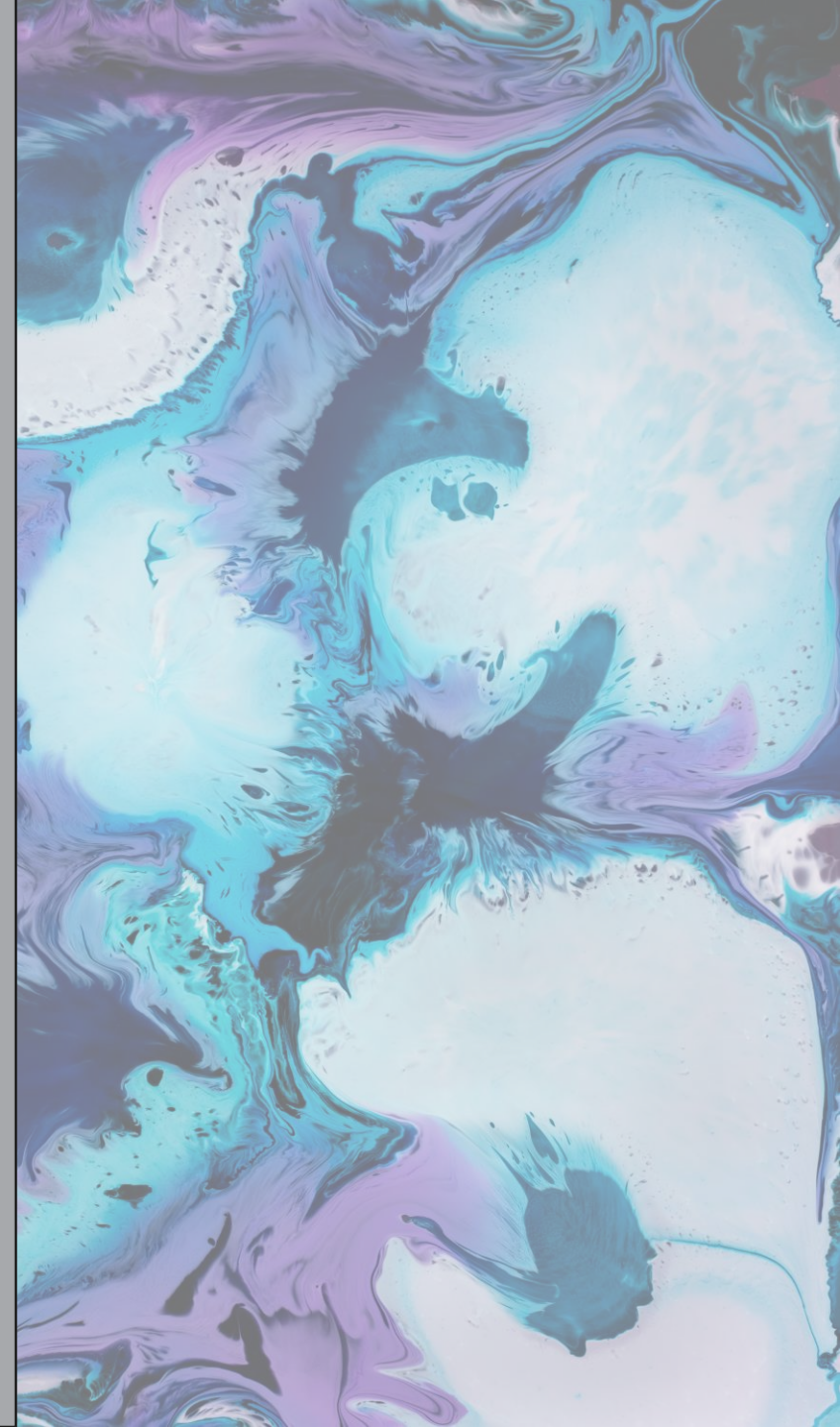
**EXAMPLE:** “Ben, I share your concern about Terry’s comments, but telling me isn’t going to make it better. I think you need to talk to Terry directly. I’m happy to help you think through how you would approach that conversation.”

2. Encourage your team member or colleague to get the issue out in the open.

**EXAMPLE:** “Ben, I share your concern about Terry’s comments and agree he shutdown the conversation before we had time to give the idea a chance. Why don’t we ask if we can have your ideas put back on the agenda for our next meeting?”

3. Encourage your team member or colleague to remove the third party from the conversation. Clarify you are happy to talk about the situation and the underlying emotions – just not about people who aren’t there to defend themselves.

**EXAMPLE:** “Ben, how did you feel when Terry said your ideas would never work?...What was your intent when you responded to Terry?...How are you thinking about the next steps?”



## Strategy #3: **Start a Proactive Conversation**

Often, **gossip** keeps people **stuck in the past** and having **backward-looking conversations**. Redirecting the conversation to a **proactive stance** can move people past their personal reactions to situations and move on to a **constructive plan**.

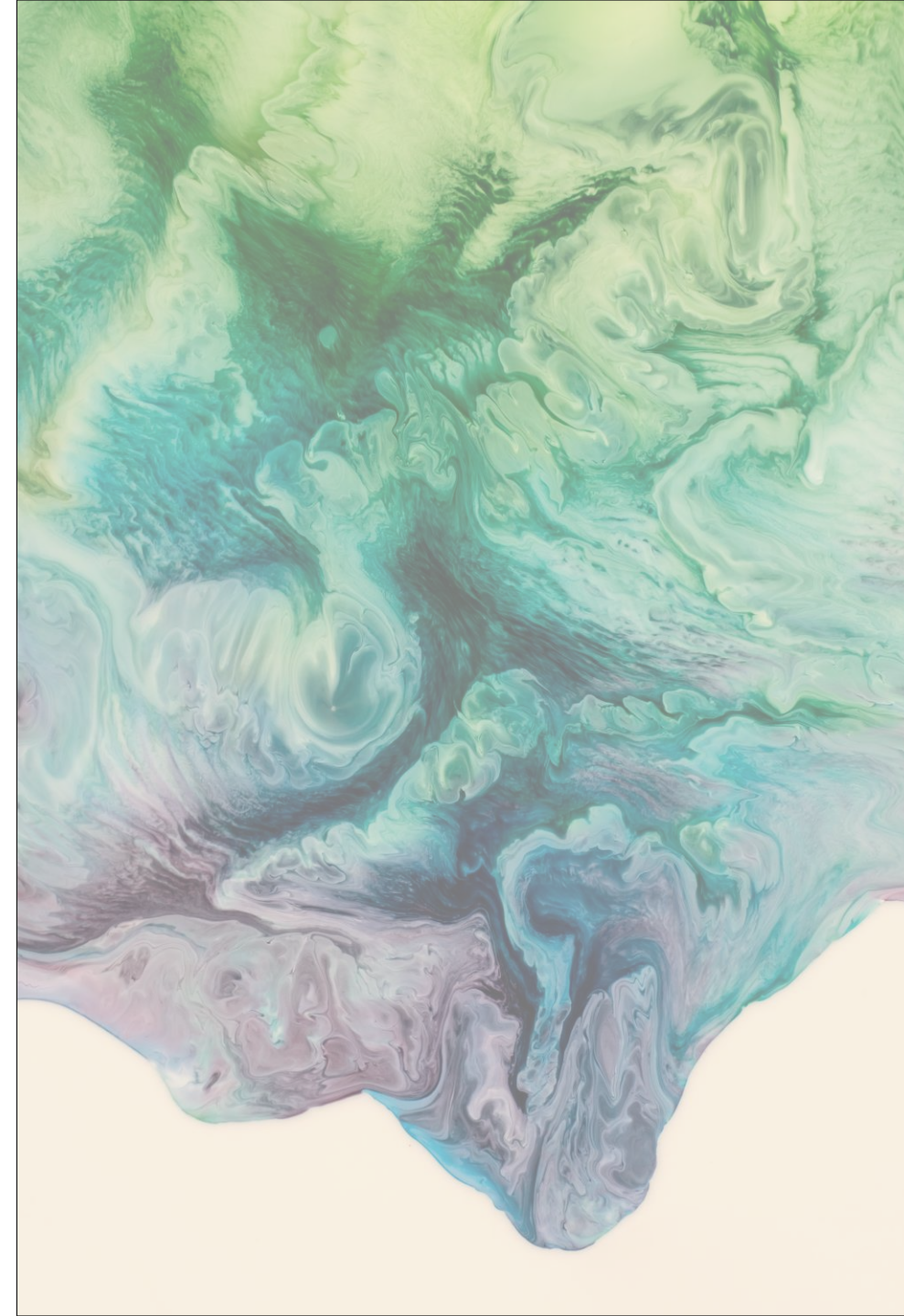
### To Try –

1. Coach your team member or colleague on better ways to approach the situation (now and in the future).

**EXAMPLE:** “Let’s brainstorm together how might you get people on board with new ideas and plans earlier in the future?...What does Terry look for in a presentation or pitch, and how might you play to his style next time so that the information will better resonate with him?”

2. Provide your own feedback about the situation that includes a way forward.

**EXAMPLE:** “When I heard your presentation this morning, like Terry, I too had some concerns about your plan. When you responded to Terry by saying you would ‘figure out the details later’ and ‘everything would be handled,’ I didn’t feel confident. Here is what it would take to get me on board with the overall idea and plan of execution...”





## Strategy #4: **Be a Role Model and Promote Fellowship**

Team members look to leaders as messengers of **organizational values**. Consistently demonstrating integrity and inclusion in your **speech, policies, actions, and decisions** will help employees follow suit.

### To Try –

1. Lead with empathy, ethics, and cooperation

**EXAMPLE:** “Ben, I would like to verify what has been said, done, and occurred with Terry before I make any final decisions on how to proceed. You know my expectations and value around maintaining an environment where we work with facts and do our due diligence in gathering information that is accurate and fair. May I please get your cooperation in this effort?”

2. Advocate for and sponsor team building, organizational events, and one-on-one meetings. The more trust and cohesion is built on a team, the less likely members are to malign one another.

**EXAMPLE:** Encourage team members to spend time together to get to know each other as people, not just coworkers or colleagues. Connect team members based on their interests, ambitions, skill set, etc.

“Ben, your ideas are always so creative and forward thinking. I would like to have you and Jasmine meet. Together I believe you both could generate new solutions to some of our current issues surrounding limited resources.”

LISTENING episode//part 1  
**COMING SOON!**

**Listening** is a skill that we must use on a **daily basis**, but how often do we **intentionally train** our **listening skills** for **better outcomes** and **interpersonal satisfaction**?

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